

Proceedings of a Uintah County Historical Society meeting. The speakers are not identified, but the woman is possibly Amy MacKnight Lube Allen.

Transcribed by Janet Taylor, Uintah County Library Regional History Center, May 2001.

Josie Morris Story

Woman's voice (possibly Amy MacKnight Lube Allen): It's kind of remarkable that we never have a family get-together that we don't talk about her. She had such an impact on our lives – she saw to it that I learned to knit and crochet. Okay, I could make a living that way. I had a gift shop for years. Josie gave me that. And, she saw that I had a piano. As well, I taught piano for twenty years, or more than that, I suppose, so you see, she's had quite an impact on my life.

Probably it would be well to say where she came from and how things started. She was born in 1874 in Little Rock, Arkansas. Her dad, Herb Bassett, was born in New York. At the age of twenty-nine he was there teaching school and farming, and it came time to go into the service. So, he entered the Civil War as a drummer because he knew how to play instruments. He played in the Fife and Drum Corps, as Josie put it. But he wasn't in the service very long, about two years. He wound up in Arkansas, and although it seems like that's kind of below the Mason-Dixon line, that's where he was.

He met Elizabeth, his wife, there. She was a Virginia lady, and I'm not real sure what she was doing there, either, or why this lady would marry this man who was past thirty and she was just a young girl. Anyhow, they did marry, and due to his ill health, they decided to come west. They were going to California. Maybe they thought they'd go find gold, maybe they thought the weather would be better. He had asthma or maybe something else. I don't know. In the records where he was let out of the Army, it's called a debility, whatever that is.

So, anyhow, they headed for the west, and Herb's brother, Sam, had been in Brown's Park for a long time. He was an old trapper, I suppose. Esther knows a lot more about this than I do, but at any rate, Sam was there and they had kept in touch with Herb, and he persuaded Herb and his little family to come to Brown's Park. They sent all kinds of stuff from her Virginia people. Fancy furniture, and china, in some of the writings we have run onto, they said, "They packed the china plates in feather-beds, so that they wouldn't be broken." (I think it was Ann that was writing this.) "But we didn't have much use for the fancy china, but we sure had use for the feather-beds." At any rate, this all wound up in Rock Springs, and then by wagon down to Brown's Park. By this time Josie was four years old.

The first year they were there, they lived on Willow Creek. Is this right, Esther? In Uncle Sam's little cabin, that's where Ann was born. And they were surrounded by Ute Indians there and Ann tells of playing with Indians under two.

If I say "Mother," [I mean] Josie. We always called her Mother. I'll tell you why a little later. Anyhow, they played with the Ute kids, and as a matter of fact, Ann was nursed by an Indian squaw, according to her writings. At any rate, Mother grew up there and Grandpa Bassett was credited with having the first school in Brown's Park. He was trying to get a school district, and that took twelve kids, to have a school district. So, Josie said in one of her interviews that she went to school when she was much too young, maybe just a little kid, maybe three years old, just to count the numbers. Because there weren't enough kids. What schooling she had was there.

They didn't have teachers, so I think Grandpa Herb taught, but they had other teachers, and this is a whole new story. Esther knows that one. I think Esther was about the last teacher they had there. But at any rate, after Josie had her schooling at Brown's Park, she was sent to Craig to stay for a little while, and after that she was educated in Saint Mary's of Wasatch, in Salt Lake. She only got to stay there about a year and a half, because her mother died and she had to come home and help take care of things.

Grandpa was not much of a provider. It seems that Grandmother Bassett was the go-getter of the family. She tried to build up her cattle, and she was going to be quite a cattle rancher. They said that she was the mainspring, but Grandpa Herb was the balance wheel of that situation. But when she died, old Grandpa Herb was just in need of somebody to help. Josie was the oldest, and I think she was about sixteen at this time. All the rest were growing up, and with no mother to take care of things, she had to come home and help take care of things for Grandpa Herb. She kind of saw to him for the rest of his life.

She married my grandfather, Jim MacKnight. I think she was about eighteen when she married him. This marriage only lasted six years and she had two children. In the meantime, old Uncle Sam had had a stroke, and he gave his place to Josie. He deeded it to her, in return for the promise that she would take care of him all the rest of his life. This was down Beaver Creek, this was the one that was on Beaver Creek. And we went over there and tried to find just exactly the spot, but there isn't a house there now. We couldn't come up with just where, but we could see that it was near the river and so on. Mattie Edwards lived in that place and I think the house burned, but at least, it's gone.

While they were there, as usual wherever Josie lived, she raised a garden and farmed and had to have water. Well, there was a spring, way back toward the mountain from their ranch, which would run toward the river if there were a ditch. So Jim MacKnight dug a ditch. According to the writings, it's still there, and can still be used, and we could see where Mother would have really had a nice place there. Wherever she lived, she always planted the poplar trees and she always had a flower garden, and this was how she lived out at Josie's Cabin.

How many of you have been out to Josie's Cabin? Have you all been there? Well, you know what it looks like. Not much like it was because it was bigger when Mom was there. Of course, I was littler. So, there were a lot of reasons why she and Jim MacKnight couldn't get along. It's in the book. It's written so many times, but whatever you read, read this book. I'm not selling this book, but it is the one that's right. But they agreed to disagree, and Josie didn't shoot him, by the way, a lot of people think that she did, but she didn't. If she'd have shot him, she wouldn't have missed him. And for a dead man, he was pretty lively. He married again and raised several more kids. It was written five kids, but I don't know for sure. I just knew my Uncle Art who was from the second marriage.

At any rate, they split up their belongings, and she didn't have very much left, and Grandpa Herb persuaded her to take her kids and go to Craig, where they could be properly schooled. By then they'd had a little schooling at Brown's Park, what was offered, but they were probably high school age, so she moved to Craig, where she kept a boarding house. Now, she'd been used to cooking for the cowboys. She was a good old cook, even at the age that I knew her. She didn't like to cook for strangers, and I had heard her say (I ran a boarding house.), "Don't ever take in a schoolteacher. They are the sloppiest people to take care of!" I don't know about that, but while she was there, she met her second husband, Charlie Ranney. He was principal of the high school there, and he had a drugstore, and I think he sort of helped her with her boarding

house situation. He did have a ranch out on the ? Creek. I don't know where that is. He was a lot older than Josie. And, for some reason or other, they didn't get along.

Anyhow, she and Charlie Ranney didn't get along. He was an old bachelor, never been married, and didn't know much about taking care of kids. And Chip was a handful. He was resentful, and very rebellious. Crawford was never that way at all. He was just a pacifist, just like old Grandpa Herb, whatever would keep the peace. But Chip went on back to the Park, and he stayed with Aunt Ann there. So, she and Charlie Ranney broke up. She moved us back. She was there for a while, but she was just lost. She just hated the hills. During this time she married another person named Charles Williams.

And Grace, who wrote the book—this happened lots of times to us, because she couldn't find any record of the marriage. We knew she was married to this Williams person, but Grace had to have the records, but finally she figured them out. She was looking up the records for Josie Bassett, and it should have been her last husband, Josie Ranney. So she figured that out, but when she found the records, it tells of Williams, that he was rather a handsome man, a prize-fighter, and he lived in Rock Springs. So I guess they lived up there for a while.

She and ? went on back to the Park. She was not happy anywhere except there. And it was there was with Wells. And that marriage didn't last very long. He died, or was killed, and that makes a fine story, too. Two or three verses of that one. Anyhow, he was an alcoholic. And as Mother told it, they had been out to a dance or something, and he'd been drunk for quite a while, and he was in bad shape. He lay there, and she did give him his last drink of alcohol. He was begging for it. If you know anything about alcoholism, which I had to live with so long, you need another drink. And you'd better be given it, because you need it. Your body has ?. She did give him his last drink, she said, and he died. And he was buried down on the far western part, where the graves are down there.

Well, she didn't have a ranch, she didn't have sheep or cattle. She met Ben Morris in the Park—he was there for some reason or another—and she married him. After a little while they found it necessary to leave the Park. And when they get out all the Rich stuff, that it would take two days, the way it's written. But she did come over into the Vernal area, to the Jensen area, to the Basin, for a permanent place to be. And I think they drove over the hill down into Echo Park, and on over. My mother tells about going back over to get the stock. They had sheep and cattle, and horses, and things like that.

I think that for the first year they lived somewhere in Jensen, where they were going to move. They leased a place to have their sheep down there. I don't know what house. She tells that they rode all over, even up behind Vernal, and everywhere, to see if they couldn't get some Indian land, or someplace that they could stand. And they finally went out where the cabin is now, they homesteaded that place. Now, this must have been about 1914 to '16, at any rate, Crawford and Chip were still living with them, with her and Ben Morris, and the first cabin they built was over in Pig Canyon. Do you know where Pig Canyon is? It's over to the east of where the ?. The floods comes out of that canyon. That's where I lived when I was born. I was born at my grandmother's place in Jensen, but that's where we lived. And my sister Belle was born there. My brother R— was born down at ?. But this was our home. This was what we called the ranch. When we came to Jensen, it was simply to be schooled. And then we had to go back.

Of course, they didn't have enough stock, didn't have enough stuff, so that Dad didn't have to work, so he'd always worked for the State Road, or he worked for the stores in Jensen. Oh, he worked away. And Josie stayed and helped farm what she had, and she never did get over

the idea that she had to be their family. And Mom had nine of us. We all weren't born out there. Frank, my second brother, was the last one to be born out there. The rest were born later, but Josie always thought that she had to be the mainspring, and she was the strong one while father worked.

She had a lot of ideas of what she wanted to do. I think that this is why she married so many times. She was a small woman, but she did chop wood, and did a bunch of things that men could do, too. So, she always had these big plans. She was going to have Dad homestead up in Doc's Valley. And then the War got in the way, and my mother was just newly married when he went away in the service, and she went with him to Fort Lewis. When they came back, why, they went on back out there to live and I can remember living there. In the meantime they had to build a new house, the one that's where it is. It's the second one that was built where the house now stands.

In the meantime, old Grandpa Herb was just not happy in the Park. He wanted to go. He went to California. We have writings of his from there, and he liked it there. He just was not a frontier man. He was a religious man and a studious person. So, after Josie got established on Cub Creek, where Josie's Cabin is now, Grandfather came over there to live. He was getting to be a very old man by now. I have pictures of him with... He had blood poisoning, and his right hand he just had a finger and a thumb. He was missing these two fingers, still he could write and got a lot of stuff – quotations from the Bible.

My mother tells that she and Grandpa Herb ran away together. She'd been living out there, that's where we lived, with Josie. Grandpa Herb wanted to go see the old soldiers while they were alive, and Josie wasn't going to let him go. He was just too old to be able to ride a stage to Craig, or something. Well, Grandfather went to Jensen with my mother, and they went separate ways. That was the last time she saw him. He died later in Illinois, in an old soldier's home.

Well, Josie brought us up. She taught us things. Like, how to keep up. She gave us a lot of pride in our appearance. Mom was busy with the little kids, and Josie was there to give us the fun things. When it came time to put us into school, she said that she could teach just as well as anybody, and she would keep us right there on the place and teach us to read and write, and she did. I knew how to do simple arithmetic, I knew my times tables and alphabet, and could read a little, when I came to Jensen to go to school. Her philosophy was that this day and age is not back like your father taught you, we're going to Jensen and we're going to school the right way. So this is how that came to be, and we lived in a lot of houses, but we never owned one. We lived there so we could get into school. And later, I got older and we went to Vernal, and we rented here and there, and finally Grandmother said, "We need somebody in Vernal." That's where they lived, and stayed the last forty years. I don't know. A long time.

So, what can I tell you more about Josie? I guess I've just about finished, really hit the high spots. These pictures I have of Josie are typical. Here's Josie. That picture is so typical of Josie, because she was always going or doing something. She never sat in the sun because she was a red-head, and her skin, she sunburned so easily. And so, you see her there, she's sewing. She was also a claustrophobic. She didn't sit in a house with closed doors. As a matter of fact, she slept outdoors. She had a little porch right out from of the kitchen door, and she slept out there, and she'd sleep out there until the snow flew. She had plenty of bedding. She couldn't stand to be stuck in a room. I don't know how old she was at that time.

Question: How many years did she live down there?

Forty. Forty or fifty. Well, she died in '64, and I think that she lived there for all the time she worked here. Something like that.

Question: My mother and Josie were very close friends. My mother, who was very well educated for the time, found her very interesting. She often remarked about Josie seeming to have an extensive education. She couldn't understand where she learned it all because she knew that Josie didn't get to go to school very much.

Woman: I believe the reason that she seemed to be so well-read is because she read. You know I was only about twelve years old, and this came from Grandpa Herb. She [Josie] always had a radio. She could always discuss. We always had a radio out there from the time that there was a radio to have, and batteries. She didn't have electricity, ever. Not there. That was one of her dreams, when she died, was to get the telephone line up there. As soon as they could do that, they could bring television. She was going to have television. She wanted one. She loved to have company. I can see her now, as soon as she'd see the dust coming up over the creek bed, she'd hurry and get some flour and start making biscuits. Boy, she made the best baking powder biscuits. It was all open beach there.

Question: Was she the one who taught you to play, or did you . . .

Woman: My Granny taught me my first chord, and she taught me a chord pattern, but no words. It doesn't always fit the tune, but it will work. Very recently now, I've learned to play by ear. And I'm using that chord pattern. I don't know, but it always comes out right. You see, Grandpa Herb had an organ at his place. He was quite a musician. Some of the readings that I went over the last day or two thinking about this thing, there were lots of organs in the park. I suppose that she was taught by him. Then she saw to it that I had lessons. . . . She taught us, and finally we could play that piano.

Question: ? her father. She spent a year and a half at Saint Mary's and was able to pick up an awful lot.

Woman: She learned a lot of things there.

Question: Do you have the magazine where it showed her milking a cow?

Woman: Those scenes were posed for *Life* magazine. What they eventually wrote was so distasteful to us that they? they told her that they would ?, but they portrayed her as a tough, raw woman. I just couldn't see Josie looking like that picture. It was ugly.

Question: I read that article about her and I remember, that's why...

Woman: Was that the only impression you had, from that article?

Answer: Yes, and I felt very strong about her before I ever came to Utah. It was notoriety rather than information.

Woman: Yes. And this is why I wanted to write the book. I wanted to tell the truth. Well, she did tell the truth. I came off with more respect for Josie than I had ever had. She was the kind of person that could bridge the gap from an earlier time. I suppose that she could have been the original Women's Libber. She was that kind of a person.

Question: Did she ever mention anything to you about whether she knew ??

Woman: Yes, and he did come back. Now, Josie ?? but Anne came out to our place probably?? and she ?? but then he mentioned the name of an old horse that they had in the Park and ?? Butch Cassidy had ?? I won't mention the name now, ?? Matt Warner had ??

There was a story about Josie and a horse. She walked down to their place [Stewart's] which was about several miles, and it was cold. She wanted to tell them that a horse had gotten stuck in a bog. And they figured that by the time she had got down there the horse was probably dead. But, he went with her and went back up, and pulled that horse out. But they said to her, "Josie, gosh, that was really nice of you to walk that far in the cold to tell us about the horse. I don't think I would have walked that far to get a horse out of a bog." And she said, "Well, I'll tell you. I'd walk more than that to get a horse out of a bog. If it had been a man, I would have left him there."

I'll have to tell you a story—it's kind of a sad story. Harry Edwards bought a place and camped right by Josie's house. She didn't want him there. She didn't like him. Well, Harry had this old red mule. It was an old son-of-a-gun. Every time they'd hook up the horses to go anywhere, the mule would follow along and bite and nip. Harry wouldn't control the mule, and wouldn't pen him up. So one day Josie got in the wagon and here was the mule,? and Mother [Josie] took out her .30-30 and shot that mule, and he fell right down in the wash. They got in the wagon and came home, and I don't know if Harry ever did figure out what happened to the red mule.

She could take care of situations, you know. She lived out there alone for all those years, but you know, she wasn't all that much alone. She lived in a house that she built. There was never a time that there wasn't somebody that needed a home, like ? and I.? Josie would say, "While you're here, let's get this done." That's how she got things built and got things done. I've pitched a lot of hay in my day. Kyla would stay with the Chews ...? and it was too far to ride out to town, so they'd stay, lots of times they'd stay a week. And I was with ? Chew and ?. And they'd visit with Josie and then get their food and they didn't have even a road in those days so they'd have to get their supplies with a pack-string. This was not unusual. She was always glad to have people come. It was bound to be lonesome out there.

Comment: In this article it says that she "hewed out" her farm out of the rock, herself.

Woman: Well, if she didn't do it, my dad did. They did dig it right out of the side of the cliff.

Comment: The way it's written it seems like it was her, doing it all by herself.

Woman: Stories can get off the track. I'll tell you, the things I've been reading the last day or two, boning up for this little chat, stories just won't quit. For the most part I've read the newspaper clippings, which point out whatever is sensational. But she wasn't that odd. She was just a little woman.

Comment: I'd like to add that she was a genius at getting people to help her. She'd get more people to help her than anyone.

She did it because she worked with them. She thought it was just good land. I worked like a dog up there. I wouldn't work that hard for myself, but she was right with me. Just made it fun. One year Boone and I went over to the ? place, on a given day of the week, with our horses, to get bum lambs. Boy, that was a big adventure. I would just not want to do it now, but we went to get whatever bum lambs there were. We would start riding and we'd meet up there. Grace's book said they all did it. But I did it, and I think we had probably fifteen or twenty bum lambs that we saved that year. We found out that if we put two little bums in one sack one would probably die. So we didn't do that any more. We'd take separate sacks. Sometimes they'd be too far gone and they'd die, but the way we fed them, we didn't have a mixture like you can go up to the feed store and get. We had powder but we didn't have a bottle with nipple. We'd warm that milk and take the bum lamb's face and put it down in the milk, and put our fingers in the bum lamb's mouth and he'd begin to suck. Pretty soon he'd get the idea of how to drink. We taught them to drink like that. Those little beggars can really bite.

Question: A couple of cowboys that I talked to remarked on how they thought how kind she was and how she always fed them, no matter what was going on. I think they all felt like they wanted to help her. Because she fed them.

Woman: LaVonda called to make apologies about not being able to be here, and she said that her kids would go down there when they knew Josie would be there, because the kids liked her. I don't know what she did, but they liked her. She made us feel important.

Comment: We went on a trip to the Stringham Cabin about ten years ago. We were sitting there eating our lunch, and a couple of people got to talking. One of the women said that Josie helped her to learn how to do many things, "She taught me how to sew dresses to wear, and so on and so forth." I know that Josie helped my mother quite a few times. She was grateful to her.

Woman: I know there are stories about Josie, how she was a desperado, and she ?, but she could butcher a beef, I helped her. I know how to butcher a beef. I learned when I lived on Willow Creek. I know how to skin a beef. We had to know how to do a lot of things. I can make mighty fine jerky. There was a time that Josie had a pet deer. There are pictures where she's wearing long skirts, and this deer is standing up. She was sitting in a room or on a porch and the deer came right up with her. During the time I lived there she would never kill a deer, but she loved to go hunting and she loved to go with Jim, my husband, because he was a good hunter. We didn't go during hunting season. But we didn't go without meat.

Comment: I wonder what's going to become of Josie's cabin. When she was there it was always neat and well cared for, and now it's almost gone to ruin.

Woman: There's a difference of opinion about what to do. While? was in charge, he wanted to restore it. There was even talk of having somebody live there to take care of it. You can't do it without somebody there. At different times someone has gone out to take some water and water the trees, but it's hard to do all of it.

Comment: One time many years ago when I was a bride in Jensen, Josie came down on her horse to give me a lovely box of. It was lovely.

Woman: Yes, Josie liked to give things. But she would never feel good unless she went away with something to give. Finally toward the end of her life, there were things she should have let go, but she felt that she had to send you away with something.

We used to milk all those cows and we'd make butter. We had a spring house. We'd have to take the milk up to the house to churn because you can't make it come to butter unless it's room temperature. So we'd go out in the early morning and bring some up to the kitchen and along about dinner we'd make a batch of butter. Then we'd take the butter to the spring house. We always had butter. We had vegetables and stuff. We had a big boiler that we could put two ? on, with a rack. And we'd boil those things. I bet we had to boil them for two hours. We never had a pressure cooker.

I knew how to harness a horse when I was just little. She had a box that we had to climb up on. Between Boone and I, we could harness a team. We were too short to reach up to put the collar on, so we'd climb up on the box, fasten the collar, and then go do the rest. Oh, I don't know what else to tell you about Josie. She was more of a mother than she was a grandmother to us because she would never give up. She was just a mother type.

I brought some books. This was prepared by ? and I'm not sure in what capacity she was working, but she put it all together. It's about the Bassettts and it's pretty much what I've told you. If anyone wants a copy of that, you're welcome to it. I have a big collection of stuff that Ann wrote. She wrote very well, but it was never published, but it was in the — oh, the Historical Society of Colorado — there's a little magazine that they put out. I got a hold of one of those magazines when I was working at the school. I needed to type forty words a minute so I got one of those magazines and copied that stuff of Ann's. So if anyone wants a copy of that you're welcome.

END OF SIDE ONE

(Side two of this tape contains information about Phosphate Mining.)